

HOUSE BILL REPORT

EHB 2579

As Passed Legislature

Title: An act relating to educational assessments.

Brief Description: Requiring classroom-based civics assessments.

Sponsors: By Representatives Upthegrove, Lantz, Dickerson, Appleton, Morrell, Hasegawa, Quall, Hunter, Haler, O'Brien, Murray, Hunt, Schual-Berke, Ormsby, Springer and Moeller.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 1/19/06, 2/2/06 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/13/06, 83-15.

Senate Amended.

Passed Senate: 3/2/06, 44-1.

House Concurred.

Passed House: 3/4/06, 76-19.

Passed Legislature.

Brief Summary of Engrossed Bill

- Defines social studies as including history, geography, civics, economics, and social studies skills.
- Requires students in one grade each of elementary, middle, and high school to take a classroom-based civics assessment.
- Directs the Superintendent of Public Instruction to work with up to 15 county advisors to develop a civics curriculum pilot project and report to the Legislature regarding the pilot project.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Quall, Chair; P. Sullivan, Vice Chair; Haigh, Hunter, McDermott, Santos, Tom and Wallace.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Talcott, Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Curtis, Priest and Shabro.

Staff: Sarah Ream (786-7303).

Background:

The goals of the Basic Education Act include providing students with opportunities to develop the knowledge and skills essential to know and apply the core concepts and principals of, among other subjects, civics, history, and geography. The Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) must develop Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALR's) in line with these goals.

Students in elementary, middle, and high school are required to learn the state's EALRs in social studies. The State Board of Education's regulations define social studies to include history, geography, and civics. By the 2008-09 school year, school districts must have assessments or other strategies in place to ensure their students have had an opportunity to learn the EALRs in social studies.

Washington law requires students to study the state and federal Constitutions before graduating from the state's public or private schools. In addition, public schools are required to have flag exercises at the start of the day, observe Temperance and Good Citizenship Day on January 16, and provide educational activities in observance of Veteran's Day.

Summary of Engrossed Bill:

Social studies is defined to include history, geography, civics, economics, and social studies skills.

Beginning with the 2008-09 school year, students in grades 4, 5, 7 or 8, and 11 or 12 will complete a classroom-based assessment in civics. Districts have the option of selecting their assessment from a list provided by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) of approved assessments. School districts must submit a verification report to the OSPI documenting the districts' use of a classroom-based assessment in civics.

The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) is directed to work with the county auditors' offices of up to 15 selected counties to develop a civics curriculum pilot project. The curriculum must include, but is not limited to: (1) local government organization; (2) discussion of ballot measures, initiatives, and referenda; (3) the role of precincts in defining ballots, candidates, and political activities; (4) the roles and responsibilities of taxing jurisdictions in establishing ballot measures; and (5) the work of conducting elections. The OSPI is directed to develop a curriculum guide that incorporates ideas from other Washington civics education programs. The pilot project will operate for the 2006-07 and 2007-08 school years. The OSPI will provide an interim report to the Legislature by December 1, 2008, and a final report by December 1, 2009, regarding the results of the projects and recommendations, if any, for expansion of the project.

Appropriation: The sum of \$25,000, from the State General Fund, is appropriated to the OSPI to provide competitive grants to school districts for activities that support the civics assessment.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: (In support) A healthy democracy and informed citizenry depends on an educated populace. It is critical that students understand the role they play in our democracy. Civics education is one of the basics, along with reading, writing, and math, and is essential to the school curriculum. However, student learning regarding civics is declining and students' knowledge of civics is alarmingly bad. This bill is essential to ensure universal exposure of students to civics and removes the loophole that allows districts to use assessments or "other strategies" with regard to ensuring student learning of civics. Assessments that have already been piloted exist, so districts do not have to reinvent the wheel. Civics instruction is already required. This bill ensures that it is taught.

(With concerns) It is important that students learn and understand civics. However, the current classroom-based assessment of social studies includes civics. This bill represents "requirement creep." It also highlights that the high stakes nature of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning is impacting teaching of Goal Two areas. Social studies is tied into history. A person whose history is taken away is a person without hope. African-American history is just as important as the history of any other people, but it is not included in the curriculum. It is important that the curriculum reflect the history of people of color.

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Uptegrove, prime sponsor; Representative Lantz; Judith Billings, Council on Public Legal Education; Russ Lehman, Olympia, Washington School Board; Patrick Palace, Washington State Bar Association; Catherine Ahl, Washington State League of Women Voters; and Rowland Thompson, Allied Dailies.

(With concerns) Alton McDonald, National Action Network; and Gary King, Washington Education Association.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.